

## Chapman University Chapman University Digital Commons

---

Education Faculty Articles and Research

College of Educational Studies

---

5-1998

# Review of *Social Cartography: Mapping Ways of Seeing Social and Educational Change*

Peter McLaren

Chapman University, [mclaren@chapman.edu](mailto:mclaren@chapman.edu)

Ricky Lee Allen

University of California, Los Angeles

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/education\\_articles](http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/education_articles)

---

### Recommended Citation

McLaren, P., & Allen, R. A. (1998). Review of *Social Cartography: Mapping Ways of Seeing Social and Educational Change*. *Comparative Educational Review*, 42(2): 225-228.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Educational Studies at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Faculty Articles and Research by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [laughtin@chapman.edu](mailto:laughtin@chapman.edu).

---

## Review of *Social Cartography: Mapping Ways of Seeing Social and Educational Change*

### **Comments**

This review was originally published in *Comparative Educational Review*, volume 42, issue 2, in 1998.

### **Copyright**

Comparative and International Education Society (CIES).

## Book Reviews

*Social Cartography: Mapping Ways of Seeing Social and Educational Change* edited by Rolland G. Paulston. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996. 456 pp.

This impressive collection of essays represents the development of what Rolland Paulston calls “social cartography,” or the visual mapping of pedagogical and ideological space. *Social Cartography* represents a wide range of efforts in what can be seen as a growing body of sociospatial analyses in the social sciences. The concerns of social cartography have been part of the discussion of critical theorists and post-colonial critics for decades, yet in various forms and to differing ends, they have resurfaced recently with a renewed urgency. As part of a renewed and intensified look at the mapping of social and epistemological space, this book offers scholarly testimony to the fact that artistic representations cannot elude the language used to interpret them as mapmakers are always intersubjectively located through the particular spatial signifiers that they employ in their various practices of “social cartography,” “social mapping,” “cognitive mapping,” “cartographics,” or just “mapping.” As Christine Fox notes, “A social map is itself a metaphor of the language of space” (p. 298). The considerable strength of this book lies in the way in which Paulston models his conceptualization of social cartography by “opening” the idea to the criticisms and spatial mis/understandings of his various authors.

In the section entitled “Mapping Imagination,” the development of social cartography is represented and contextualized as a current, pressing need in comparative education studies. For example, Paulston and Martin Liebman cast the postmodern as a real and imagined condition of interrelated and symmetrical discourses—whether modern, postmodern, or “Other”—that must be integrated and synthesized into “the field” of educational knowledge. They argue further that visually mapping the connections between modern and postmodern theories of educational knowledge (see p. 15) forces the mapper to “see” social connectedness through comparing, integrating, and physically drawing perceived shifts in subjectivities and material realities. Contributor David Turnbull is less optimistic about such relativistic cartographies because he understands mapping to be intricately imbricated in a colonial context that relies on Western science and nation-states as spatial tools of domination. In Turnbull’s view, the postmodern and postcolonial represent a breaking through of dominated voices that have been historically and geographically subjugated and silenced for centuries, both in global and local contexts. He calls for a countermapping of the everyday private spaces that are produced in connection with normative relations of territorialization, mapping, and domination.

Emphasizing subjectivity, the “Mapping Perspectives” section explicates several metaphorical strategies for mappers that imagine “solving” the “postmodern problem” vis-à-vis integration and visual synthesis. For instance, Joe Seppi characterizes the social mapper as an integrator of competing social interests over land and its conceptual representation. Turning to the cartographic act, Anne Buttimer represents mapping as a “Phoenix” that is symbolic of Western humanism’s breaking free

Permission to reprint a book review printed in this section may be obtained only from the author.

of its "Faustian container" in the struggle to create "new levels of understanding humanity and its terrestrial home" through conceptual synthesis (p. 153). Bringing the integration theme to the field of management, Anne Sigismund Huff's mapping constitutes a semiotic modeling that reflects the scientifically produced and inscribed "mind" that undertakes technical decisions in an institutional environment that must "account for" postmodernism. Liebman's mapping represents a type of "homing mechanism" for integrating the postmodern into a naturally "centering" self awash in a world of increasing spatial incongruities (i.e., postmodern perspectives and realities). To Liebman's credit, he displays a poststructural visual mapping model where "known" discourses are named, related, and scaled while positioned on top of an earthlike layer of soil that buries and hides unnamed discursive representations and communities (p. 210).

The section on "Mapping Pragmatics" switches from concerns over questions about subjectivity to the challenge of objectivity in social mapping. While depicting the postmodern as a location for those in denial of "real" totalities, Nelly Stromquist makes the claim in a very powerful and provocative chapter that academic feminists have succumbed to the "blinding" distraction of postmodernism rather than embracing the universal reality of women's global struggles as experienced by particularized political actors working in popular (i.e., "real") educational projects related to gender. Other authors in this section, however, neither deny the importance of totalities nor uphold the truth of just any objectivity. A good example is Fox's model of sociocultural critique where dialogical, intercultural theories, such as cultural identity theory and postcolonialism, offer enhanced possibilities for connecting with local groups' realities and subjectivities while also seeking to implicate the construction of the cartographers' identity in "more totalized" systems of social power.

The most engaging section, "Mapping Debates," charts several ideological interrogations of the purported possibilities of social mapping. Reasserting structural historical analysis over the spatial, Carlos A. Torres posits, from a progressivistic, "critical modernist" view, that social mapping must evolve from metaphor to analogy in a marketplace of ideas for it to have social worth, a feat accomplished only by withstanding the binary "scientific test" of positivism and constructivism. However, other authors are cautious of mapping not so much because they require it have "inherent" value but because they are anxious about mapping's spatial and temporal relationship to hegemony. For example, John Beverly argues that cognitive mapping is a new hegemonic form that reifies capitalist and state domination by failing to problematize the position of privilege of mappers and their maps in the reproduction of subaltern identities. Furthering Beverly's position, Patti Lather contends that critical academics should direct more attention to the postcolonial problematics of assisting the subaltern in decolonizing space and opening spaces for self-determination and a radical politics of difference, in contradistinction to the postmodern problematics of "more accurately" representing the "Other."

We agree with Turnbull in that maps are both product and producer of socio-spatial relations of power. Paradoxically, maps are texts that seek to contextualize but cannot escape the locationality of the mapper, the map reader, and the mapped. As Edward Soja argues in *Postmodern Geographies* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), spaces and spatial discourses (such as mapping) are already inscribed with

and given presence by power relations from the moment of their initial identification. The spatial discourse of social mapping, as outlined in *Social Cartography*, is already being touted as a way of integrating decentered postmodernisms into the field, a view justly contested by several contributors. We, too, question how scholars can begin to integrate the field of educational knowledge in comparative education when the field itself is considered by many to be a natural and evolutionary state of affairs ready and waiting to be mapped. We find it problematic to assume that any sort of synthesis of subjectivities can occur through mapping without first considering how spatial subjectivities and practices act to produce and exclude difference, while obscuring and occluding the identity of the privileged.

Furthermore, the colonization of the lived spatialities of the subaltern, as emphasized by Turnbull, constructs a general condition of spatial and representational violence in that the spatial knowledge of elites contradicts the spatial knowledge of the marginalized at the site of social institutions in ways that have serious material consequences. For example, an integrationist approach to mapping could be considered violent because it does not emphasize a deconstruction of the rationalities that are historically, geographically, and socially related to the production of the very category of “comparative education” along with its corresponding dominant and subaltern theoretical communities. In other words, the paradox that underlies some of these chapters is that while they define themselves as critical of the status quo they normally operate within larger structures that function to contain and neutralize them.

More specifically, we are concerned that the mapping of racialized bodies in relation to the construction of whiteness and capitalism is lacking from this text. The mapping strategies of Paulston and Liebman suggest the orchestration of a symphony with no instruments in mind or, more accurately, no bodies in mind.

The project of mapping must be, as Lather suggests, a space that is both decolonized and opened to the colonized. With this caveat in mind, *Social Cartography* should be read from the more critical perspectives on the social construction of space that are presented in some of its chapters. From a more sympathetic angle, we see this book as presenting important theoretical groundwork for a critical pedagogy of social cartography. We were struck by the alertness and openness of the authors toward the social terrain within which their involvement as cartographers takes place. The pedagogy that we see as accompanying some of the insights in this volume would explicitly foreground the agencies of spatial production: dominant discursive practices and social formations and relations, such as imperial narratives and systems of classification, as well as social relations of production. In other words, a critical pedagogy of social cartography would include a social and cultural politics that is firmly situated in an egalitarian politics of redistribution (i.e., a struggle against global capitalism) and an emancipatory politics of recognition (a struggle against systems of representation and the narrativizing authority of the state). As a counterhegemonic pedagogy, it is designed to rupture the continuity of dominant representational systems based on property and territory and the scientific cartography developed to inventory the “discoveries” of the West. Such a pedagogy would also deal with the production of the social space of everyday life and the ways in which racial discrimination, economic status, and epistemologies encapsulate, link,

## BOOK REVIEWS

or separate individuals from each other. Here, educators could rework the narrative codes of everyday life to make explicit the alternating and contradictory modes of subject formation that characterize postmodern, postindustrial society.

*Social Cartography* is an ambitious, important, and timely collection that will be of considerable interest to educators, cultural workers, and critical social theorists alike.

PETER L. McLAREN

*University of California, Los Angeles*

RICKY LEE ALLEN

*University of California, Los Angeles*